

March 26, 2012

Honorable Representative,

My name is Taj Burgen; I work as a Youth Engagement Specialist with Association for Children's Mental Health (ACMH). It is my job to ensure that our systems are guided by the voices of our youth and empower them to share their stories and experiences. It is also my role to encourage them to be active in their mental health services and know their rights and teach them to advocate for the things that they believe in. How can I empower them to be proactive in their care and be engaged in services, when I'm not sure services will be available to them? In support of the youth that I work for and those I will work for, **I am asking you to support Mental Health Parity in addition to supporting coverage for children with Autism by including a Mental Health Parity bill with SB 414, 415, and 981.**

Many of the youth I work with can tell you the importance of receiving mental health services and the difference it has made in their lives, but they can't fathom insurance being a barrier to receiving those services. Our youth are dealing with a multitude of things, our goal should be to eliminate as much as we can, not add more. There is a youth I know, who lives has to manage the effects of alcoholism daily in her home; the stress, the added arguments, the pressure of taking care of younger siblings at the age of 16 and being the 'responsible' one. In her world, insurance is not a guarantee, but piece of mind through her mental services is. What happens if that piece of mind is taken from her, because of something that is beyond her control? She can't control the type of insurance her family has, nor does she care about 'coverage' so, do we allow her to become another lost teenager in our society or do we provide mental health parity to ensure that ALL of our youth are given the opportunity to soar?

In my youth's world, there is always someone telling them why they CANT do something, versus why they CAN! So, will you be another barrier to our youth receiving the services they need? They don't understand the intricate world of insurance, but they do understand being denied! I ask you to help me, help them!

Sincerely,



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